3. Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of Ukraine on Merchant Shipping: This agreement deals with cooperation in the field of merchant shipping.

Missing Indian employees in Saudi Arabia

1717. SHRI NANDI YELLAIAH:
SHRI YADLAPATI VENKAT RAO:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there are reports of missing Indian Employees in Saudi Arabia with the Indian Embassy;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the details of the action taken by Indian Embassy with the Saudi Arabia Government, in tracing the missing Indian employees;

(d) whether Government have set up any vigilance over the agents in India and Saudi Arabia, who lure Indians for lucrative jobs and ultimately cheat them;

(e) if so, the details thereof; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes.

(b) The number of persons "missing" over the last three years as reported to the Embassy/Consulate in Saudi Arabia, is as follows:

Year	Cases Reported	Cases Settled
2000-01	101	38
2001-02	105	39
2002-03 (upto November, 2002)	73	15

(c) Our Embassy and Consulate in Saudi Arabia took up these cases with the Saudi authorities, their employers and where required, the recruiting agents in India. As a result of these efforts, some of the missing persons were located and made to establish contact with their family members in India. In most cases, it is a deliberate decision on the part of the individuals not to communicate with their families for personal reasons.

(d) As per the Indian Emigration Act, 1983, the recruitment of Indian workers has to be done by the recruiting agents duly authorised by the Protector General of Emigrants, Ministry of Labour. The Protector General of Emigrants in India and our Embassy/Consulate in Saudi Arabia keep a constant vigil over the recruitment process.

(e) Whenever, specific instances of malpractices by the recruiting agents are noticed, action is taken by the Protector General of Emigrants against the concerned recruiting agents under the Indian Emigration Act of 1983. Our Embassy/Consulate in Saudi Arabia remain in regular touch with the Protector General of Emigrants on the issue.

(f) Does not arise.

Free Trade Zone for ASEAN

†1718. SHRIMATI MAYA SINGH:Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India had made a proposal to ASEAN an organization of ten South East Asian countries for creating a Free Trade Zone;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government are keeping in touch with the concerned countries; and

(d) if so, the progress made so far in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (d) At the India-ASEAN Summit at Phnom Penh on November 5, 2002, Prime Minister has proposed the setting up of an India-ASEAN Free Trade Area within ten years. An India-ASEAN Task Force on Economic Linkages is to prepare a draft Framework Agreement within one year, which will address this proposal and related initiatives for expansion of India-ASEAN economic relations. The first meeting of the Task Force will be held in New Delhi from 18-21 December, 2002.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.